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# Lindisfarne and the Gospels: The Art of Interpretation

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The Lindisfarne gospel codex is celebrated above all for its artwork: the intricate illuminated lettering of its incipits, the so-called ‘carpet’ pages, the evangelist portraits, the elegant arcades of its canon tables. It is this supplementary artwork that gives this gospel book its extraordinary popular appeal, and not its textual content. Its Latin texts are as inaccessible to most of its present-day viewers as they were to the average Northumbrian of the eighth, ninth, or tenth century. The texts are for the learned, for monks or other specialists; the artwork is for all.<sup>1</sup>

Yet this is not art for art’s sake but art in the service of the text, beauty promoting truth by representing it visually and thereby *interpreting* it. The aesthetic elements do not exist in isolation. They belong to an interpretative framework intended to enhance understanding of the gospel texts and prevent misreading. Whether in the form of artwork or supplementary text or a combination of the two, the Lindisfarne codex seeks to shape its users’ response to the canonical texts. The gospels are already interpreted by the gospel book that contains them.

The codex opens with two prefaces by Jerome and one by Eusebius which between them provide an introduction to Jerome’s revised Latin gospels and the canon tables, a rationale for the four gospel collection, and biographical information about the evangelists. The canon tables that

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<sup>1</sup> The textual content plays a minimal role in works intended for a non-specialist readership (e.g. Janet Backhouse, *The Lindisfarne Gospels* [London & New York: Phaidon, 1981], and Richard Gameson, *From Holy Island to Durham: The Context and Meanings of the Lindisfarne Gospels*, [London: Third Millennium], 2013).

follow encourage the reader to compare and contrast parallel versions of the same material in different gospels. Each gospel is preceded by an *Argumentum* or preface and an elaborate set of *Capitula* or chapter-summaries, providing an orientation to the text and enabling one to navigate it with ease. In the margins of the texts themselves, different systems of enumeration are keyed to the *Capitula* and to the canon tables. The Lindisfarne artwork belongs within this diverse body of supplementary material which serves to *frame* the gospels, both collectively and individually. This art is intends both to delight and to instruct, and its aesthetic and didactic functions belong together. The challenge is to specify just how the various types of artwork in the Lindisfarne codex further the interpretation of the texts.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. The Canon tables

The canon tables were devised by Eusebius of Caesarea for a new single-volume edition of the four gospels, and they represent one among a number of possible responses to the high levels of overlap between the canonical texts.<sup>3</sup> This overlap might be viewed negatively as producing

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<sup>2</sup> For a survey of the Lindisfarne artwork, see J. J. G. Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts, 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Harvey-Miller, 1978), 35-40; for the textual content, Patrick McGurk, *Latin Gospel Books from A.D. 400 to A.D. 800* (Paris-Brussels: Aux Éditions “Érasme”, Anvers-Amsterdam: Standaard-Boekhandel, 1961), 33-35.

<sup>3</sup> The canon tables with their prefatory letter are reprinted in the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (28. revidierte Auflage), ed. B. and K. Aland *et al.* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 89\*-94\*, and in earlier editions. The function of the canon tables in relation to the gospels is analyzed by E. Nestle, “Die Eusebianische Evangelien-Synopse,” *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 19 (1908), 40-51, 93-114, 219-32. The classic study of the artistic tradition is C. Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Kanontafeln: Kunstgeschichtliche Studien über die eusebianische Evangelien-Konkordanz in den vier ersten Jahrhunderten ihrer Geschichte* (Göteborg: Oscar Isacson's Boktryckeri. A.-B, 1938, with accompanying *Tafelband*). For recent appreciations of Eusebius's scholarly achievement, see Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Bellknap, 2006), 133-232; Matthew R. Crawford, ‘Ammonius of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea and the Origins of Gospels Scholarship’, *New Testament Studies* 61 (2015), 1-29).

redundancy and contradiction – problems that could most effectively be eliminated by creating a single enlarged and coherent gospel out of the earlier confused plurality. A gospel along these lines was in use for two centuries or more among Syriac-speaking Christians, who only adopted the ‘separated’ gospels of the Greek and Latin world in the course of the fifth century.<sup>4</sup> Eusebius is aware of this singular Syriac gospel at least in its Greek form. He describes it as a gospel *diatessarōn* (literally ‘from four’ but probably meaning ‘fourfold’), and attributes it to Tatian, a pupil of Justin Martyr active during the later decades of the second century.<sup>5</sup> In the mid-sixth century, an attempt was made to relaunch this *Diatessaron* gospel in heavily edited Latin guise, within the single-volume edition of the New Testament known as *Codex Fuldensis*.<sup>6</sup> This is the work of Bishop Victor of Capua, and its underlying assumption is again that gospel plurality is a source of redundancy, contradiction, and confusion.<sup>7</sup>

Alternatively, gospel plurality may be viewed positively. Differences within overlapping material would then represent not embarrassing contradictions but additional theologically-productive perspectives on a given story or saying. This view was forcefully articulated by Origen,<sup>8</sup> and it is presupposed in Eusebius’s canon tables – a cross-referencing system that makes it possible to move from one gospel to any available parallel passages in the others. In

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<sup>4</sup> William L. Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 35-67; Matthew R. Crawford, ‘Diatessaron, a Misnomer? The Evidence of Ephrem’s Commentary’, *Early Christianity* 3 (2013), 362–85.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* iv.26.6.

<sup>6</sup> E. Ranke (ed.), *Codex Fuldensis: Novum Testamentum Latine Interpre Hieronymo ex Manuscripto Victoris Capuani* (Marburg and Leipzig: N. G. Elwert, 1868); Nicholas J. Zola, ‘Tatian’s *Diatessaron* in Latin: A New Edition and Translation of Codex Fuldensis’ (PhD thesis, Baylor University, 2014). The impact of Tatian’s work on the Latin West has been studied by Ulrich B. Schmid, *Unum ex Quattuor: Eine Geschichte der lateinischen Tatianüberlieferung* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005), 177–82.

<sup>7</sup> Initially uncertain of the author of the *Diatessaron* gospel, Victor inquires ‘quis gesta vel dicta domini et salvatoris nostri evangelica lectione discreta in ordinem quo se consequi videbantur’ (Ranke, *Codex Fuldensis*, 1). Victor takes it for granted that the individual gospels fail to present the Lord’s actions and sayings in correct chronological sequence – a view he shares with Augustine (*De Cons. Evang.* ii.21.51).

<sup>8</sup> See my *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 542-52.

compiling his canon tables, Eusebius must assume that comparing and contrasting gospel parallels is a worthwhile activity that ought to be encouraged and facilitated. In an explanatory letter to Carpianus, the precedent he cites is not Origen but Ammonius of Alexandria, compiler of a different *euaggelion dia tessarōn* in which a continuous text of the Gospel of Matthew was aligned with parallel passages in Mark, Luke, and John.<sup>9</sup> This work was presumably formatted in one, two, three or four columns, as appropriate to the section of Matthew on any given page. It is this format that creates the categories with which Eusebius works. He too shares Ammonius's Matthean bias: only in canons VIII and IX is Matthew absent. In canons I-VII, the distinctions between Matthean passages shared with three other evangelists (canon I), with two (canons II-IV) and with one (canons V-VII) are clearly indebted to Ammonius's variable columns. As Eusebius notes, the crucial difference is that in his own presentation the text of all four gospels is left intact. He has replaced Ammonius's parallel texts with numbers arranged in columns that correspond to a section enumeration running through the text of each gospel.

Eusebius divides each gospel into sections that reflect its varying relationship with the others; in Matthew there are 355 such sections. These sections do not necessarily correspond to discrete items of narrative or teaching within Matthew's own text, which are tracked by way of the quite different *capitula* enumeration system in which Matthew is divided into 88 chapters or 'readings'.<sup>10</sup> In the Eusebian enumeration system, a new section begins wherever the relationship

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<sup>9</sup> According to Eusebius, 'Ammonius the Alexandrian, evidently with great diligence and industry, left to us a fourfold gospel in which he placed alongside the Gospel of Matthew the similar passages from the other evangelists.' While Eusebius is critical of this work ('The inevitable result was that the orderly sequence of the other three was destroyed, making a consecutive reading impossible'), he acknowledges that his own work is based on it (Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graecum*<sup>28</sup>, 89\*). The translation is my own.

<sup>10</sup> For the standard Greek *capitula* (*kephalaia*), see H. von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt hergestellt auf Grund ihrer Textgeschichte*, I.1 (Berlin: Duncker, 1902), 405-11. The Latin *capitula* are more diverse than the Greek: totals for Matthew are in the range 28-100. See D. de Bruyne, *Sommaires, divisions et rubriques de la Bible Latine* (Namur: Auguste Godenne, 1914), 239-311.

between Matthew and other gospels changes – where, for example, material that Matthew shares with Mark and Luke (canon II) is followed by material shared with Luke alone (canon V).

Eusebius and Jerome provide clear instructions for the use of the canon tables.<sup>11</sup> If in reading Matthew one wishes to trace parallel passages in other gospels, one finds the current Matthean section number and the numeral in red beneath it which indicates the table in which information about the relevant parallels is to be found. Thus Matthew's fourth beatitude, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied', is section xxviii in Eusebius's enumeration. Beneath this figure is a red figure V, and when canon V is consulted it turns out that section xxviii in the Matthew column is aligned with section xlvii in the Luke column. This section of Luke's text can then be consulted so as to compare the two versions: 'Blessed are those who hunger *now*, for *you* will be satisfied'. The movement is from Matthew to the canon table to Luke. It is almost equally easy to turn from Luke to a parallel in Matthew; the system allows for a starting-point in any one of the gospels.

In the Lindisfarne codex the ten canon tables are distributed over sixteen pages, following two similar sets of instructions for use from Jerome and from Eusebius in Latin translation.<sup>12</sup> What is surprising is that these canon tables are largely redundant. No-one wishing to track down a parallel passage would ever need to consult them. In the margins of the gospel texts are found not only the section and canon numbers but also the section numbers of the parallel passages in other gospels.<sup>13</sup> At section xxviii of Matthew we do not need to revert to canon V to discover the

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<sup>11</sup> Jerome's explanation is found in the prefatory letter to Damasus that opens his gospel edition (the *Praefatio Hieronymi in Quatuor Evangelia*, PL 29.525).

<sup>12</sup> Canon table I, ff. 10r–11r; II, ff. 11v–13r; III, f. 13v; IV, f. 14r; V, ff. 14v–15r; VI, f. 15v; VII, VIII, f. 16r; IX, f. 16v; X, 16v–17v. On the pagination of the canon tables in the Latin tradition, see C. Nordenfalk, *Die Spätantiken Kanontafeln*, 171–73, 208–11. (The canon table pages and the entire Lindisfarne book can be viewed at [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton\\_MS\\_nero\\_d\\_iv](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Cotton_MS_nero_d_iv)).

<sup>13</sup> This is a characteristic feature of the Latin manuscript tradition (e.g. the *St Augustine Gospels* [6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century]

parallel at section xlvii of Luke, for the Lukan figure is already provided within the Matthean text. We can therefore proceed directly from Matthew to Luke, avoiding an unnecessary detour. The canon tables are still usable, despite a significant number of minor errors, but no-one would ever need to use them. Yet they are executed with the most refined artistry. The question is what this artistry contributes to a gospel book when the tables' original function has been superseded by a more efficient cross-referencing system.

These canon tables are not purely decorative. They respond to the perception that gospel interrelations are hopelessly confused by analyzing the different modes of interrelatedness and displaying the order underlying the apparent chaos. The enumeration of parallels is located within the pillars and arcade of an architectural structure, a reassuring and uplifting image of stability and symmetry, beauty and rationality. The pillars and the arcade mark the divisions between the gospels, showing that their plural perspectives are real and necessary, resisting every attempt to reduce them to singularity. The arch rising from the pillars at either end of the design speaks of the overarching harmony that embraces the difference between gospels rather than being undermined by it. These images show that anxieties about chaos and confusion are groundless. The pillars are slender and elegant, but they rest on firm bases matched by capitals more than adequate to bear the weight of the arch and the arcade resting upon them.

The pillars and the arch of these classical architectural structures are filled with unclassical interlace designs and with trains of interlinked birds or bird-headed serpents. In christianizing this traditional imagery, the artist might have had in mind the words of Psalm 148, where *serpentes et volucres pinnatae* are among the subjects of the exhortation, *laudent nomen Domini* (vv.10,12). In nine of the sixteen pages of these canon tables, the trains of living

creatures arise out of the interlace-filled bases of the pillars as far as the matching capitals, and from the outermost capitals around the upper arch, where the leading creatures of two such trains meet at the apex.<sup>14</sup> The pillars solidify the boundaries between the gospels and confirm the integrity of the individual text. Within the pillars, the trains of interlinked creatures accompany the sequences of disconnected numbers as they proceed down the page, reminding us that the separated passages enumerated here have their natural habitat within an intricately connected narrative. Within the arch, the meeting of two trains of creatures provides an image of harmony between narratives with different starting-points. The structure as a whole unites earth and heaven, signified by the bases and the arch. Everything about it discourages the assumption that a singular gospel would be preferable to a plural one. Singularity could be achieved only by an act of wanton destruction that shattered the pillars differentiating one gospel from another.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Evangelist Portraits

In the canon tables the gospel codex encourages its users to reflect on the plurality it contains

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<sup>14</sup> Ff. 10r, 10v, 11r, 12v, 13r, 14v, 15r, 16v, 17r. In the other seven pages, the relationship is reversed: the animal images are placed in the bases and capitals, and the abstract patterning fills the pillars and the upper arch (ff. 11v, 12r, 13v, 14r, 15v, 16r, 17v). The stylized birds within the arches may develop from the same source as the eastern tradition of bird images above the arches: see for example the canon tables in the two older Ethiopic Garima Gospel books (Abba Garima I, III, 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries), and the forthcoming monograph on these books co-authored by Judith McKenzie and myself.

<sup>15</sup> Pillars separating each column of figures are a Latin characteristic. In the older Greek tradition, pillars within the table either separate groups of columns or are absent altogether (as in the *Garima Gospels*). For representative examples see the illustrations in C. Nordenfalk, *Die Spätantiken Kanontafeln (Tafelband)*, no. 10 (Venice, Biblioteca Mariana, gr. I, 810<sup>th</sup> century) [], no. 11 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Coislin gr. 20 [10<sup>th</sup> century]), nos. 84–102 (London, British Museum, Harley 2795 [9<sup>th</sup> century]). In contrast, the Latin Harley 1775 (nos. 84–102, British Museum [end of 6<sup>th</sup> century]) lacks internal pillars, although the distribution of the tables is similar to that of the Lindisfarne Gospels (Nordenfalk, *Die Spätantiken Kanontafeln*, 208–10).



and to read *across* the texts, from one column to another, in order to benefit from a second, third, or fourth perspective on the story or teaching in question. The perspectives must remain distinct, however, in spite of the common ground they share: that is the hermeneutical principle enshrined in the canonical gospel's plural form. The perspectives overlap, they are focused on the same object, and yet they are irreducibly individual. For that reason the tradition names four individual evangelists, provides them with a short biography, and assigns a time, place, and occasion to each of their writings.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not any of this information is 'historically reliable' in a conventional sense is beside the point here.<sup>17</sup> The underlying concern is to ensure the integrity of the originally anonymous gospel texts by connecting them to a named author. The same concern is perceptible when names and biographies are supplemented by portraits.

The evangelist portraits of the Lindisfarne gospels depict individuals who are already known to the reader from the prefatory material to the volume as a whole and to each individual gospel. In the second of the two Jerome prefaces,<sup>18</sup> we are informed that:

First of all is Matthew, a tax-collector also known as Levi, who produced a gospel in Judea in the Hebrew language, primarily for those among the Jews who had believed in Jesus and who were no longer serving the shadow of the law now that the truth of the

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<sup>16</sup> The gospels are anonymous and provide few clues as to their authors' identities. The first complete set of evangelists' names is found in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* iii.1.1 (c. 180 CE). On evangelists' names in the early manuscript tradition, see S. J. Gathercole, 'The Titles of the Gospels in the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts,' *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104 (2013), 33–76.

<sup>17</sup> For a somewhat sceptical assessment, see my *The Fourfold Gospel: A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, forthcoming). Richard Bauckham takes a more positive view on this (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 202–39).

<sup>18</sup> Following the *Novum opus* preface addressed to Damasus (ff. 3r–5v), the *Plures fuisse* (ff. 5v–8r) was originally the Preface to Jerome's commentary on Matthew (PL 26.16–18: *Hieronymus, Commentariorum in Matheum libri IV*, ed. D. Hurst and M. Adriaen, CCSL 77 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1969], 1–2).

gospel had arrived.<sup>19</sup>

Jerome's preface echoes earlier versions of the evangelist traditions, including the ones incorporated into the Lindisfarne volume in the form of an *Argumentum* that opens the prefatory material attached to each gospel.<sup>20</sup> These *Argumenta* are generally known as the 'Monarchian prologues' on account of their uninhibited references to Christ as God. Monarchianism is, however, a theological tendency associated with the late second and early third centuries, and it is likely that these prologues actually date from the latter part of the fourth century. They have been attributed to Priscillian, a Spanish theologian executed for alleged heresy at Trier in 385 CE, and they were composed for incorporation into four-gospel codices.<sup>21</sup> The preface to Matthew is more concerned with the significance of the Matthean genealogy than with the person of the evangelist, but the biographical information it provides is one of the sources for Jerome's somewhat fuller statement. Elements taken up by Jerome are italicized:

Matthew in Judea, as he is placed first in order, so *he first wrote a gospel in Judea,*  
having been called to God from his work as *a tax-collector.*<sup>22</sup>

In the Lindisfarne codex, the Matthew portrait (f. 25v) is influenced especially by

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<sup>19</sup> F. 18v: 'primus omnium Matheus est, publicanus cognomine Leui, qui euangelium in Iudaea Hebreo sermone edidit ob eorum uel maxime causam qui in Iesum crediderant ex Iudaeis et nequaquam legis umbram succedente euangelii ueritate seruabant.'

<sup>20</sup> Ff. 18v–19r (Matthew), ff. 90r–90v (Mark), ff. 131r–131v (Luke), ff. 203v–204r (John).

<sup>21</sup> On these Prologues see Dom John Chapman, O.S.B., *Notes on the Early History of the Vulgate Gospels* (Oxford: OUP, 1908), 217–88, including texts and English translations. The attribution to Priscillian is rejected by Marco Conti, although he accepts an origin in 'an early phase of Priscillianism' (*Priscillian of Avila: The Complete Works* [Oxford: OUP, 2010], 315; texts and translations, 250–57).

<sup>22</sup> 'Mattheus in Iudaea sicut in ordine primus ponitur, ita euangelium in Iudaea primus scripsit, cuius uocatio ad d[eu]m ex publicanis actibus fuit.'

Jerome's version of the Matthew tradition. According to Jerome, Matthew's intended Jewish Christian readership had turned from 'the shadow of the law' (*legis umbra*) to the truth of the gospel. The shadow metaphor is derived from Hebrews 10.1, where it is said that the law has 'a shadow of good things to come' (*umbra bonorum futurorum*).<sup>23</sup> In turning from the law to Christ one moves out of the shade into the full light of reality. The Lindisfarne Matthew portrait makes the same point by way of a related New Testament image, that of the veil or curtain that conceals the law's true meaning until it is removed in Christ (2 Cor.3.12-18). This image accounts for the diminutive figure who peers out towards the evangelist from behind a drawn-back curtain.<sup>24</sup> The figure behind the curtain is unlikely to be Christ, since he appears to be subordinate to the evangelist and looks eagerly towards the codex on which the evangelist is working. Presumably he wants the book completed so that he can read it. He is, then, a member of the evangelist's intended readership as envisaged by Jerome: 'Jews who had believed in Jesus and who were no longer serving the shadow of the law now that the truth of the gospel had arrived.'<sup>25</sup>

Awaiting the completion of the volume on which Matthew is working, this zealous Jewish Christian is also clutching a smaller volume with which he is presumably already familiar. If the smaller book contains the Law of Moses, it is remarkably compact. A more likely explanation is that the Lindisfarne scribe regards the genealogy that opens Matthew's Gospel as

<sup>23</sup> Cf. also Col.2.17; Heb.8.5.

<sup>24</sup> A possible parallel has been suggested in the Mark portrait from the 6<sup>th</sup> century Rossano gospels, where a tall female figure stands opposite the evangelist as he writes (R. Gameson, *From Holy Island to Durham*, 59n). Generally identified as Sophia/Wisdom, this figure appears to be a later addition to the Rossano image: so William C. Loerke, in *Codex Purpureus Rossanensis: Commentarium*, ed. G. Cavallo, J. Gribomont, William C. Loerke (Rome: Salerno Editrice; Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1987), 154–55. There is no suggestion in the Lindisfarne Matthew that the additional figure is inspiring the evangelist, as in the case of the Rossano Sophia.

<sup>25</sup> Contrast the 'multivalent' reading proposed by Michelle P. Brown, according to whom 'the two nimbed figures in the Lindisfarne miniature simultaneously symbolise the Old and New Testaments, the Incarnate and Risen Christ, the Evangelist, the scribe, the teacher/preacher and every believer' (*The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality, and the Scribe* [London: British Library, 2003], 36 = *eadem.*, *The Lindisfarne Gospels and the Early Medieval World* [London: British Library, 2011], 123).

virtually a separate book. The genealogy introduces itself as ‘The Book of the generation/genealogy of Jesus Christ...’ (*Liber generationis Iesu Christi...*), and the Lindisfarne scribe concludes from this that Matthew’s gospel – as opposed to its prefatory genealogy – begins only with the account of the generation/birth of Christ that begins at 1.18. And so the scribe provides the lesser and the greater works with separate incipits: *Incipit evangelii genealogia Mathei* (Mt.1.1, f. 27r), and *Incipit evangelium secundum Mattheum: XPI generatio sic erat...* (Mt.1.18, f. 29r). The famous Chi-Rho page marks a second opening, virtually a second work.<sup>26</sup> In the Matthew portrait, the figure behind the curtain has already absorbed the shorter Book of the Genealogy and is eagerly awaiting its weightier sequel.

In the second of his prefaces, Jerome has this to say about Luke:

Third, Luke – a doctor, by nationality a Syrian, an Antiochene, whose praise is in the gospel, himself a disciple of the apostle Paul – composed his work in the regions of Achaëa and Boeotia, repeating some things in an exalted style, and, as he confessed in his preface, writing what he heard rather than saw.<sup>27</sup>

Jerome has again drawn a number of these details from the Monarchian Prologues:<sup>28</sup>

Luke – *a Syrian by nationality and from Antioch, a doctor by profession, a disciple of the*

<sup>26</sup> Indications of a new start at Matthew 1.18 may be seen in *Codex Amiatinus*, f. 805r, and the *St Augustine Gospels*, f. 4r.

<sup>27</sup> F. 6v: ‘tertius Lucas medicus natione Syrus Antiochensis, cuius laus in euangelio, qui et ipse discipulus apostoli Pauli in Achaiae Boetiaeque partibus uolumen condidit quaedam altius repetens, et ut ipse in proemio confitetur audita magis quam uisa describens.’

<sup>28</sup> The first half of this Preface to Luke is itself heavily dependent on the earlier ‘anti-Marcionite Prefaces’, which in the case of Luke exist in both Greek and Latin (texts in K. Aland, *Synopsis quattuor Evangeliorum* [Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1967<sup>4</sup>], 533).

apostles, after following *Paul* until his martyrdom – continued to serve God blamelessly.

For he remained without wife or children and died at the age of 74 in Bithynia, full of the Holy Spirit. When gospels had already been written, by Matthew in Judea and Mark in Italy, he too was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write a gospel in the regions of *Achaea*, indicating at the beginning that others had already been written.<sup>29</sup>

The Prologue goes on to speak of the ‘urgent necessity’ that the evangelist should combat judaizing or docetic heresies among the Greek faithful. While there is nothing in the Lindisfarne Luke portrait that directly alludes to any of these biographical details, the preface and the portrait complement each other. In the portrait we see the one about whom we have read in the preface: not just an evangelist identified only as *ho hagios Lucas* but also a doctor from Syria in Antioch, a former follower of the apostles and especially of Paul, a lifelong celibate, a zealous opponent of heresy. Together, the preface and the portrait serve a similar role to an author biography and photograph on the back cover of a modern book. The combination of word and image responds to the reader’s desire to identify the authorial voice that speaks throughout the book, from beginning to end, whatever its subject matter.

In the Lindisfarne portraits a prominent place is given to the winged creatures emerging from behind the haloes around the evangelists’ heads: a human in the case of Matthew, a lion for Mark, a calf for Luke, and an eagle for John. These are not just ‘evangelist symbols’ but also the evangelists’ heavenly counterparts, the exalted beings of the Book of Revelation who surround

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<sup>29</sup> F. 131r.: ‘Lucas, Syrus natione, Antiochensiae, arte medicus, discipulus apostolorum, postea Paulum secutus usque ad confessionem eius, serviens deo sine crimine. nam neque uxorem umquam habens neque filios, LXXIII annorum obiit in Bithynia, plenus spiritu sancto. qui cum iam scribata essent evangelia per Mattheum quidem in Iudaea, per Marcum autem in Italia, sancto instigante spiritu in Achaiae partibus hoc scripsit evangelium, significans etiam ipse in principio ante alia esse descripta.’

the divine throne and lead the heavenly worship with their version of the trisagion: ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the One who was and who is and who is to come’ (Rev.4.6-8).<sup>30</sup> Both the earthly evangelist and his heavenly counterpart are identified by captions, one in Greek, the other in Latin: *ho hagios Matheus / Imago hominis* (f. 25v); *ho hagijs Marcus / Imago leonis* (f. 93v); *ho hagios Lucas / Imago vituli* (f. 137v); *ho agios Iohannes / Imago aequilae* (f. 209v).<sup>31</sup> Here the use of *imago* may allude to the fact that the beings around the divine throne bear the *likeness* of a human or lion or calf or eagle, although that is of course not what they actually *are* (Rev.4.7: *simile...*). Between their respective hands, paws, hooves or claws, each of the heavenly beings holds a book which corresponds to the earthly books of the evangelists. Each of the canonical gospels has acquired a heavenly patron. The Lindisfarne scribe is concerned that the pairings of evangelist and patron should be accurately grasped. The double captions of the evangelist portraits place a certain emphasis on this point, and so does the set of equations at the head of the *Incipit* page of each individual gospel: *Matheus homo* (f. 27r),<sup>32</sup> *Marcus leo* (f. 95r), *Lucas vitulus* (f. 139r), *Iohannis aquila* (f. 211r).

The correspondences are emphasized so as to ensure that this version of the scheme prevails over its two main rivals. In the *Book of Durrow* an older version is followed, deriving from Irenaeus and Victorinus, where Mark is associated with the eagle (f. 84v) and John with the

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<sup>30</sup> On the textual and artistic development of this tradition, see my *Gospel Writing*, 553-89.

<sup>31</sup> The combination of Greek and Latin implies an Italian exemplar which has added evangelist symbols to portraits based on Greek models. In view of the Greek caption, there is no need to suppose a separate Latin origin for the John portrait, where the evangelist is portrayed frontally and not in profile (as suggested by R. Gameson, *From Holy Island to Durham*, 57, 59). Extant Greek evangelist portraits are from a later period, and an earlier and more diverse Greek tradition may underlie the Syriac Rabbula Gospels (6<sup>th</sup> century), which feature a frontal seated Matthew, a half-profile seated John, and a frontal standing Mark and Luke (ff. 9v-10r). See ‘The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts’, *Art Studies: Medieval, Renaissance and Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927/1929), 115-47 (part 1, 1927), 3-29 (part 2, 1929).

<sup>32</sup> Compare the St Augustine Gospels, f. 2v, where ‘Matheus hominem’ occurs on the otherwise blank page facing the opening of Matthew.

lion (f. 181v).<sup>33</sup> These identifications were reversed by Jerome, producing the familiar version of the scheme followed by the Lindisfarne scribe. A third version was also in play, as Augustine reversed Jerome's first two pairings: to Augustine the regal lion seemed better suited to Matthew, the human to Mark. In his commentary on Revelation, Bede follows Augustine's identifications.<sup>34</sup> The Lindisfarne scribe follows Jerome's version, however, since his gospel codex is based on Jerome's revised gospel texts, his two prefaces, and his transmission of the Eusebian canons. Jerome refers not only to the heavenly scenario depicted in Revelation 4 but also to its origins in Ezekiel's vision of the heavenly chariot borne by cherubim with four faces:

The first face, that of a man, signifies Matthew, who as if of a man began to write: *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham*. The second is Mark, in whom the voice is heard of the lion roaring in the wilderness: *The voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths*. The third is that of a calf, which prefigures the evangelist Luke as he begins with Zechariah the priest. The fourth is John the evangelist, who, taking the wings of an eagle and soaring into the heights, discourses of the Word of God.<sup>35</sup>

This passage occurs in the second of the two Jerome prefaces. After the first of these has introduced his revised gospel text with the accompanying canon tables, the second is concerned

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<sup>33</sup> Details in F. Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 567-77.

<sup>34</sup> *Bede, Commentary on Revelation*, tr. and ed. Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 134-35.

<sup>35</sup> Ff. 7r-7v: 'prima hominis facies [Matheum significat] qui quasi de homine exorsus est scribere: *liber generationis Ihu Xpi filii David filii Abraham*; secunda Marcum in quo uox leonis in heremo rugientis auditur: *uox clamantis in deserto, parate uiam domini, rectas facite semitas eius*; tertia uituli quae euangelistam Lucam a Zacharia sacerdote sumpsisse initium praefigurat; quarta Iohannem euangelistam qui adsumptis pinnis aquilae et ad altiora festinans de uerbo dei disputat.'

primarily to differentiate canonical from apocryphal gospels. Only the four canonical gospels have the heavenly patrons glimpsed by Ezekiel and John, prophets of the old and the new covenants respectively. Their prophetic visions of the four heavenly beings ‘clearly show that four gospels alone ought to be received, and that all apocryphal ones are dirges for dead heretics rather than songs for living ecclesiastics.’<sup>36</sup> The evangelists’ heavenly counterparts and patrons guarantee the normativity of their work, and it is therefore important for the Lindisfarne scribe to avoid ambiguity and to ensure that the identifications are clear.

In three of the four portraits, the evangelist is viewed in profile and in the act of writing. John, however, is viewed frontally, his eyes staring directly at the viewer and his hand gesturing towards his completed gospel, written on a scroll rather than in a codex. The combination of profile and frontal representations finds a parallel in the portraits of the Ethiopic Abba Garima III gospel book (5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century), where an image of the evangelist Mark, seated and in profile, contrasts with frontal images of four standing figures (Eusebius[?], Matthew, Luke, John).<sup>37</sup> If Mark’s chair is an episcopal throne, he is depicted here in his traditional role as the first bishop of Alexandria, with which the church of Ethiopia had strong connections; that would account for the distinctive portrayal. In the case of the Lindisfarne John portrait, the representation of this evangelist probably reflects the early recognition that his gospel differs from the other three in its stress on the divinity of Christ: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (Jn.1.1). According to Clement of Alexandria, writing in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, ‘John, noting that the bodily facts [*ta sōmatika*] had been set forth in the [earlier]

<sup>36</sup> F. 8r: ‘quibus cunctis perspicue ostenditur quattuor tantum debere euangelia suscipi et omnes apocriphorum nenas mortuis magis hereticis quam ecclesiasticis uiuis canendas.’

<sup>37</sup> Jules Leroy, ‘Un Nouvel Évangéliste éthiopien illustré du monastère d’Abba Garima’, in *Synthronon: Art et archéologie de la fin de l’antiquité et du moyen âge*, ed. A. Grabar *et al.* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1968), 75–87; figures 1–5 represent Eusebius, Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John respectively (76–77).



gospels, at the encouragement of his acquaintances and by inspiration of the Spirit, produced a spiritual gospel [*pneumatikon euaggelion*].<sup>38</sup> Clement has in mind here the contrast between the emphasis on Jesus' humanity expressed in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke<sup>39</sup> and the substitution in John of a divine origin. Similarly, the Lindisfarne John appears to be directing the viewer to the very beginning of his gospel, with its explicit affirmation of Christ's divinity.

### 3. Cross pages

The Lindisfarne volume opens with a full-page image of a cross consisting of six interlinked patterned squares, two representing the arms, three the upright, and one the point of intersection (f. 2v). Within the resulting quadrants, two further squares above and rectangles below are coordinated with the cross in such a way that the ensemble stands out sharply against the alternating red and yellow interlace squares of the background. The facing page contains the illuminated 'incipit' of the 'prologus x canonum', the preface to Jerome's gospel edition in which the canon tables are introduced, and this format of patterned cross followed by incipit recurs in connection with each of the four gospels.<sup>40</sup> Each gospel is immediately preceded by an evangelist portrait and a cross page, and the latter is as distinctive to a specific evangelist as the former. Just as there is a Matthew evangelist portrait, so there is a Matthew cross page, both equally distinct from equivalent pages in Mark, Luke, and John. In contrast, the initial cross page may be seen as a frontispiece to the whole volume. To link it exclusively to the facing Jerome

<sup>38</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* vi.14.7.

<sup>39</sup> Mt.1.1–17; Lk.3.23–38; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* vi.14.5.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew (ff. 26v–27r); Mark (ff. 94v–95r); Luke (ff. 138v–139r); John (ff. 210v–211r).

preface would be to place the latter on a level with the gospels, and that can hardly have been intended. We might then describe this first patterned cross image as the ‘Gospels cross page’.

It is misleading to refer to these patterned crosses as ‘carpet pages’ or ‘cross-carpet pages’.<sup>41</sup> These are not carpet-like designs which happen to include a more or less evident cross motif; rather, they are representations of the crucifixion as the site of paschal glory. In assigning these representations to each individual gospel and to the collection as a whole, the artist-scribe presents the gospel narrative as a movement towards a single goal, the victory of the cross. This interpretation of Lindisfarne’s abstract cross pages is supported by a structurally similar image of the crucifixion in the Durham Gospels.<sup>42</sup> This image is located at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, and depicts a bearded and robed Christ with a soldier in each of the lower quadrants, one piercing his side with a lance, the other lifting up the vinegar-soaked sponge, and an angel in each of the upper quadrants. The soldiers are necessarily taller than the angels in order for the cross to accommodate Christ’s body – in spite of the position of the head high above the cross-beam. These images of soldiers and angels are clearly the basis for the upended rectangles and squares in the lower and upper quadrants of Lindisfarne’s Gospels cross page and for the more symmetrical use of squares or rectangles at equivalent points in the Mark, Luke, and John pages.<sup>43</sup>

Lindisfarne’s abstract cross scenes are placed at the beginnings of gospels, whereas the Durham Gospels image seems more closely associated with the end of Matthew than with the beginning of Mark. It makes little difference, however, whether a cross page anticipates the end

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<sup>41</sup> While ‘cross-carpet’ (e.g. J. Backhouse, *Lindisfarne Gospels*, *passim*) is preferable to ‘carpet’ alone, used by the majority of scholars, the ‘carpet’ element is still intrusive.

<sup>42</sup> A.II.17, f. 38(3)v. On this book and its artwork, see McGurk, *Latin Gospel Books*, 29–30; Alexander, *Insular Manuscripts*, 40–42.

<sup>43</sup> F. 94v (Mark), f. 138v (Luke), f. 210v (John).

from the standpoint of the beginning or presents it retrospectively. The more interesting question is how a single image of the cross can do justice to a narrative which culminates in the dual event of passion and Easter. At this point the great seventh century controversy about the date of Easter becomes unexpectedly relevant.

What is ostensibly at issue in this controversy is whether Easter Sunday must fall between days 14-20 or 15-21 of the relevant lunar month: an apparently trivial difficulty which (so we are tempted to think) only an extraordinary degree of intransigence could have failed to resolve with ease. Yet the difference is only trivial if one overlooks the significance of typology. That is the issue highlighted by Bede when, as his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* draws to a close, he incorporates a letter from Ceolfrid to Naiton, king of the Picts, on the observance of Easter (*observantia paschae*).<sup>44</sup> We recall that the feast referred to by the Germanic word “Easter” is actually the Christian *pascha* (passover), an Aramaic word taken over into the Septuagint<sup>45</sup> whose fortuitous association with the Greek *paschein* (‘suffer’) helped to establish it as the preferred term for the Christian festival in both Greek and Latin linguistic environments.<sup>46</sup> The relation of the Christian festival to an Old Testament type will depend on the selection of the fourteenth or fifteenth day of the lunar month as the date on which the Easter

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<sup>44</sup> Bede, *Hist. eccl.* v.21. Page references are to C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896).

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Ex.12.11; Lev.23.5; Num.9.2; Dt.16.1 (LXX). Reverting to the Hebrew, Jerome transliterates and vocalizes the consonantal *psh* as *phase*.

<sup>46</sup> The *pascha/paschein* link is already implied in Luke 22.15, and is explicitly stated in an Easter homily of Melito of Sardis (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century): ‘What is the Pascha? It gets its name from what happened: from “suffer” [*pathein*] comes “suffering” [*paschein*]. Learn then who is the Suffering One [*ho paschōn*]...’ (*Peri Pascha* 46; see S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis, On Pascha, and Fragments* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1979]). Melito’s text is the prime example of the early ‘quartodeciman’ theology in which the *pascha* is focused ‘not on Christ’s passion in isolation but rather on that event in the context of the whole redemptive act, from his incarnation to his glorification’ (Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity* [Collegeville, MN: SPCK, 2011], 45).

or paschal Sunday would ideally fall.<sup>47</sup> If Easter Sunday should approximate as closely as possible to the fourteenth day then the Christian *pascha* is identified with the scriptural one in which the crucial event is the slaughter and consumption of the passover lamb.<sup>48</sup> If the ideal date for Easter is the fifteenth day, then a different typology is operative. ‘Easter’ now commemorates the events of the day after the passover sacrifice, the day of redemption on which the people finally embarked on their exodus from Egypt.<sup>49</sup> On either scenario, the celebration of the Christian *pascha* on a Sunday ensures the link with Christ’s resurrection. Yet if the *pascha* is celebrated on the fourteenth day, then the resurrection will be conflated with the death of Christ as the antitype of the paschal lamb. Easter triumph will be identical to the victory of the cross. If Easter cannot be celebrated before the fifteenth day, however, then the resurrection event is tacitly identified with exodus redemption and differentiated from the sacrifice of Christ the paschal lamb.<sup>50</sup> Roman missionaries and romanizing Anglo-Saxons and Celts campaigned tirelessly for an Easter celebration on the fifteenth day or the nearest Sunday afterwards, and their eventual success prepared the ground for the now-familiar distinction between ‘Good Friday’ and ‘Easter’. In the rival tradition long maintained in Columba’s Iona, Easter glory is

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<sup>47</sup> The ideal is that the Christian *pascha* should coincide with the ancient Hebraic one: ‘Si ergo fieri posset, ut semper in diem XV<sup>um</sup> primi mensis, id est in lunam XV<sup>am</sup> dominica dies incurreret, uno semper eodemque tempore cum antiquo Dei populo, quanquam sacramentorum genere discreto, sicut una eademque fide, *pascha* celebrare possemus’ (Plummer, 337).

<sup>48</sup> Bede/Ceolfrid cite Exodus 12.1–3, 6, where instructions are given for the slaughter of the lamb on the fourteenth day of the month, but they argue that the crucial event is the Feast of Unleavened Bread which commemorates the exodus itself (cf. Ex.12.34) and which – so they claim – commences on the fifteenth day (Plummer, 334–35).

<sup>49</sup> ‘Ipsa est enim eadem nox, in qua de Aegypto per sanguinem agni Israelitica plebs erepta est; ipsa, in qua per resurrectionem Christi liberatus est a morte aeterna populus omnis Dei. Mane autem inlucescente die dominica, primam paschalis festi diem celebrarent. Ipsa est enim dies, in qua resurrectionis suae gloriam Dominus multifario pia revelationis gaudio discipulis patefecit’ (Plummer, 336).

<sup>50</sup> ‘Constat autem, quia non XIII<sup>a</sup> die, in cuius vespera agnus est immolatus, et quae proprie *pascha* sive phase dicitur; ; sed XV<sup>a</sup> sunt educti ex Aegypto, sicut in liber Numerorum apertissime scribitur: “Profecti igitur de Ramesse XV<sup>a</sup> die mensis primi, altera die phase, filii Israel in manu excelsa”’ (Plummer, 335). The scriptural citation is from Numbers 33.3, where Bede and Ceolfrid find a reference to ‘another passover day’, which they identify with the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

already manifest in the crucifixion, understood in Johannine terms as Christ's enthronement.<sup>51</sup>

The Lindisfarne community was shaped by the Iona tradition, although it had to accommodate itself to the new Roman ways after the Synod of Whitby in 664 CE. In their different ways, the cross pages of the Durham and Lindisfarne gospel codices express that vision of the cross as the supreme revelation of the divine glory. The Durham cross page does so by representing an enthroned Christ surrounded by an angelic court even as his physical body is the object of human violence and mockery. As in the Gospel of John, the crucified Christ is identified with Isaiah's vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up... Above him stood the seraphim".<sup>52</sup> In the Lindisfarne images, paschal glory is transmuted into the beauty of intricate abstract patterns.

#### 4. Incipits

Together with the other supplementary material in the Lindisfarne codex, the artwork is intended to interpret the gospel texts, guiding and shaping its reader's response to them. The canon tables proclaim the stability, harmony, and integrity of the gospel's fourfold structure. In conjunction with the prefaces, the portraits present the evangelists as individual authors whose work is

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<sup>51</sup> For Irish opposition to the Iona position, see the letter of Cummian to Segéné, fifth abbot of Iona (623-52); text and translation in Maura Walsh and Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, *Cummian's Letter De Controversia Paschali, together with a related Irish Computistical Tract, De Ratione Computandi* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Biblical Studies, 1988), 56-97. Cummian insists that the fourteenth day of the first month is associated with the death of Christ – for, as the Apostle Paul put it, 'Christ our pascha has been sacrificed' (1 Cor.5.7) – but not with his resurrection (ll. 23–25). To commemorate the resurrection on the fourteenth day would be to push the burial back to the thirteenth and the crucifixion to the twelfth, which is, of course, absurd (ll. 84–85). On the basis of the gospel chronology, Cummian assumes that cross and resurrection are distinct events that cannot be commemorated together.

<sup>52</sup> Is.6.1-2; cf. Jn.12.31-34, 38-41.

uniquely authorized in heaven. The cross pages point to the common goal of their work, which is to testify to the glory of the crucified Christ. It only remains to consider the moment when the artwork invades the gospel texts themselves, rather than simply prefacing them. This takes place in the gospel openings or *incipits*, where the initial letters and words of a gospel are expanded into decorative designs that provide the most elaborate artwork in the entire book. As the cross pages anticipate the gospel endings or *explicits*, so the *incipit* pages emphasize the significance of beginnings, transfixing the reader-viewer's attention, retarding the onward linear movement of the reading process. It is hard to turn the page from the *incipit* to the relatively unadorned pages that follow.

All four gospels explicitly thematize their own beginnings. Matthew begins with the *liber generationis*, a book of origins. Mark announces itself with the words, *Initium evangelii Iesu Christi*. Luke tells how his own work reflects the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses *ab initio*, together with his own careful researches *a principio*. In John the beginning of the gospel is identical to the absolute beginning that comprehends all things: *In principio erat verbum*. Only in Luke does the reference to the beginning come too late for the Lindisfarne *incipit* page. These diverse beginnings encapsulate the gospels' interrelatedness. The canonical gospel begins with a genealogy that includes major figures and events of the Old Testament, and it begins again with Jesus' conception through the Holy Spirit (Matthew). It begins with John the Baptist, who prepares the way of the Lord in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophetic testimony (Mark). It begins with the original apostolic testimony and its critical investigation (Luke). It begins with a beginning that precedes even the genesis of heaven and earth (John). These are not separate beginnings but a single beginning in plural form.

In the Lindisfarne codex we not only read of that beginning, we also view it.<sup>53</sup> Here there are five gospel incipit pages, including the two in Matthew, and they each contain 4-6 lines of text<sup>54</sup> and between 43 and 62 letters.<sup>55</sup> Line lengths vary widely between 3 and 24 letters, and there is no correlation between the number of lines on an incipit page and the number of letters.<sup>56</sup> This suggests that the design of these pages is determined in part by decisions about appropriate sense-units. In each case the *incipit* opens with an initial group of three enlarged and ornately decorated letters, which may be fused into one. One of these letters (I or Q) may extend down the entire length of the page.<sup>57</sup> After this initial group the size of the script diminishes in stages over the course of the page, with subsequent changes in script size occurring at the ends of lines.<sup>58</sup> This diminuendo effect eases the transition to the ‘normal’ script on the pages to follow.

The contents of these gospel incipit pages are as follows:

*Mt. inc.-1:*     LIBer / generati/onis Ih[s]u / Xp[ist]i filii David f[i]lii Abraham...

*Mt. inc.-2:*     XPI / autem gene/ratio sic erat cum / esset desponsata / mater eius  
Maria Ioseph...

*Mk. inc.:*       INItium / evan/gelii Ih[s]u / Xp[ist]i fili d[e]i sicut / scriptum est /  
in Esaia propheta...

*Lk. inc.:*       QUOniam / quidem / multi cona/ti sunt ordina/re narrationem...

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<sup>53</sup> See the analysis of the Lindisfarne *incipits* in M. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe*, 331-44.

<sup>54</sup> Mt.-1, x4; Mt.-2, x5; Mk., x6; Lk., x6; Jn., x5.

<sup>55</sup> Mt.-1, x46; Mt.-2, x62; Mk., x58; Lk., x47; Jn., x43.

<sup>56</sup> Mt.-2 and Jn. have 5 lines each, respectively containing 62 and 43 letters, at the top and the bottom of the total range. Mk. and Lk. have 6 lines each, respectively containing 58 and 47 letters.

<sup>57</sup> Mt.-inc.-2 differs here, with XPI extending over two lines.

<sup>58</sup> Counting the initial group as one, there are five script sizes in Mt.-1, Mk., Lk.; four in Mt.-2; three in Jn.

*Jn. inc.:*        IN Prin/cipio / erat verbum / et verbum erat / apud d[eu]m et  
d[eu]s...

The initial groups of three letters allude to the Trinity. The viewer whose gaze is held by these letters is contemplating a monogram of the triune God. In the beginning was God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As the author of the later bilingual colophon recognized, it is this God who is foundation and source of the gospel narrative:

+ Trinus et unus d[eu]s evangelium hoc ante saecula constituit  
ðe ðrifalde 7 anfalde god ðis godspell aer vorulda gisette (259r)

That the eternal God is threefold appears especially in the distinct, separated letters of the Lukan QUO monogram. The oneness of this threefold God may be contemplated in the fused letters of the Matthean LIB, the Markan INI, and the Johannine INP. That this triune God is not an abstraction but the God of the gospel is reflected in the long descending letters, I or Q, which may signify the divine condescension that occurs in the incarnation. It is specifically the Second Person of the Trinity whose destiny it is to become incarnate and to suffer. For that reason, the second letter of the Matthean LIB monogram intersects with the horizontal stroke of the first to form a cross. The second letter of the Markan INI also displays a cross, in defiance of normal orthography.

The second Matthean *incipit* differs from the others, although it shares their three-letter structure and their ornamental motifs. Here, the three Greek letters *Chi-Rho-Iota* are no longer an



indirect allusion to the Trinity but rather a direct reference to Christ, preserving the Greek *nomen sacrum* abbreviation as in other occurrences of ‘Christ’ or ‘Jesus’ throughout the Lindisfarne volume. All three letters are outlined in black and yellow, with a double row of red dots around the group as a whole, but the regular interlace patterning in the *Rho* and the *Iota* sets these letters apart from the more complex design of the *Chi*. This *Chi* is a cross, and its cross-like shape may be the reason why the Greek lettering is preserved. It is necessary and fitting for the gospel narrative to culminate in its protagonist’s crucifixion, for the cross is signified in the initial letter of ‘Christ’. As in the cross pages, this *Chi* is a transfigured cross. The curved or circular motifs between and beyond the extremities of the letter may suggest that this cross is a fruitbearing tree, the tree of death as the tree of life.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the five gospel *incipits*, the Lindisfarne prefatory material contains a number of further occurrences of the *incipit* formula followed by illuminated initial lettering. Eight of these introduce the *Argumentum* and *Capitula* that precede each gospel, but these are limited in scale and leave the normal two-column text format intact. The *Argumenta* all open with the evangelist’s names, the initial letter of which is given fairly elaborate decorative treatment.<sup>60</sup> The opening words of the *Capitula* are treated similarly,<sup>61</sup> and so too with the second Jerome preface (*Plures fuisse*) and the *Eusebius Carpiano* near the beginning of the volume.<sup>62</sup> None of these *incipits* significantly retards or disrupts the flow of the text. In the first Jerome preface, however, the opening words are presented in a way that anticipates the gospel *incipits*:

<sup>59</sup> There are small-scale analogies to the second Matthean *incipit* in the pages following the *incipits* of Mark, Luke, and John. In all three cases the word *fu*it is highlighted (at Mk.1.4 [f. 95v], Lk.1.5 [f. 143r], Jn.1.6 [f. 211v]), indicating the beginning of the main narrative after a non-narrative prologue (Mk.1.1–3; Lk.1.1–4; Jn.1.1–5).

<sup>60</sup> F. 18v (Mat/[theus]), f. 90r (Mar/cus), f. 131r (Lucas Syrus), f. 203v (Iohannes).

<sup>61</sup> F. 19r (Genera/tionum), f. 91R (Esai/ae), f. 131v (Praefatione), f. 204r (In Prin/[cipio]).

<sup>62</sup> F. 5v (Plures fuisse), f. 8r (Eusebius Carpiano).

NOVUM / opus fa/cere me cogis ex / veteri ut post / exemplaria

scrip/turarum toto orbe dispersa quasi quidam arbiter [sedeam]...

(A new work you compel me to make out of the old, that over copies  
of the scriptures scattered throughout the whole world [I might sit] as some kind of  
arbiter...)

Discounting the final line (*-turarum... arbiter*), which anticipates the ‘normal’ lettering of the pages that follow, this *incipit* page contains 51 letters distributed over five lines. Both figures lie in the middle of the range for the gospel *incipits*. Here, then, the distinction between the gospel *incipit* and the prefatory one breaks down; the *Novum opus* is treated as though it were gospel. The main difference is that the highlighted initial lettering forms a complete Latin word rather than a trinitarian monogram or a Greek abbreviation. *Novum* is the first word of the preface as it is also the first word of the volume, and it is this word that arrests the reader’s attention and invites reflection on the theme of newness. In the first instance, the newness in question is that of Jerome’s edition of the gospels, with its revised text, its preface, and its canon tables.<sup>63</sup> This newness also extends to the Lindisfarne codex, itself a *novum opus* for its scribe and the community in and for which he writes. Yet there are also scriptural echoes at play here. To make a new work out of the old is to re-enact the divine work of renewal:

*Et dixit qui sedebat in throno, Ecce nova facio omnia... Ego sum A et Ω, initium et finis...*

(Rev.21.5-6)

*Si qua ergo in Christo, nova creatura – vetera transierunt, ecce facta sunt nova.*

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<sup>63</sup> To which have been added the *Plures fuisse* and the extension of the two-column *per cola et commata* format.

(2 Cor.5.17)

Jerome's new work has been created out of the old just as the new covenant fulfils but also supersedes the old (cf. Heb.8.8-13). In each case, newness is an absolute rather than a relative concept. This is not a newness that will in due course age and fade and be superseded by some future *novum*. Rather, the scriptural passages promise a constant renewal.

In another register, something similar can be said about the Lindisfarne artwork. If there is such a thing as 'great' art, its greatness consists in its capacity to renew both itself and those affected by it as it passes from one context into another. Yet the Lindisfarne artwork exists not for itself but to enhance and interpret the gospel texts that gave rise to it. In this *novum opus*, the artwork mediates the renewing power of the fourfold gospel.